

Neighborhood Planning for Small Cities

“Qualify” Neighborhood Associations to Receive City Planning Grants

NEIGHBORHOODS MATTER.

Small cities and towns are usually dominated by their neighborhoods; and the neighborhoods tend to be close to downtown. Neighborhoods, broadly defined, include groupings of single family homes, multi-family dwellings be they individual apartment or condominium complexes or groups of multi-family communities in close proximity.

The city’s obligation is to protect and enhance its neighborhoods and help residents plan for their environment for the present and the future. Keeping people safe in their homes and neighborhoods is the primary job of every city and town. Neighborhoods, homes, apartments and condos must be valued and protected from crime, falling property values, structural deterioration and obnoxious intrusions.

A neighborhood planning program initiated by the city, but run by the residents, will help neighborhoods get organized, find their leaders, define their boundaries, express their vision and plan for social events and physical features such as land uses, streets and access to parks, schools and shopping that preserves and enhances their neighborhood.

The city’s neighborhood program elements are:

- To establish a neighborhood planning process within city government with standards and guidelines that prepare and reward neighborhood associations that become “qualified”.
- To establish a city system that “qualifies” neighborhood associations to receive city planning grants and technical assistance once their plan is “qualified” by the city.

- To work with residents to become “qualified” by identifying neighborhood boundaries, establishing an association with designated leaders and planning for land uses and neighborhood parks, schools, shopping and streets.
- To periodically evaluate the performance of each neighborhood using a prescribed set of standards embodied in city and neighborhood plans.

Active resident participation is, as always, critical.



Single-family homes are the traditional neighborhoods with leaders, boundaries and plans.



Mixed-use neighborhoods with individual or multiple apartments, condos, offices and shops are neighborhoods to be organized and planned.

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THE NEIGHBORHOOD PLANNING PROCESS.

Neighborhoods are more than houses and subdivisions. Neighborhoods are organic places that grow and change. They are the places where families live and participate in society. Neighborhoods have homes, apartments and condos with access to schools, parks, shopping and other activities integral to daily life. Building neighborhoods involves creating and strengthening all these people-oriented places as a holistic system.

The Vision to Strategy to Action continuum

anticipates that the vision of the city to be an interesting, pleasant and prosperous place depends on the successful strategy to create and maintain strong neighborhoods. The vision of the residents for their neighborhood drives the process.

HISTORIC NEIGHBORHOODS.

Many small cities and towns have close-in historic neighborhoods with the grand old home built during the Gilded Age. Others have mid-century modern neighborhoods that offer neighborhood amenities and affordable housing. Whatever the close-in neighborhoods feature, they are a resource to be preserved.

Pathways from these neighborhoods to main street, schools, parks and neighborhood shopping are life-giving connections.

Grant programs, historic commissions and celebrations of the city’s founding story all enhance the investment quality of historic neighborhoods.

The Neighborhood Planning Process A Checklist

1. Form a neighborhood planning group within city government assigned to work with neighborhood associations, to create a template for a neighborhood plan that meets city standards and to set a process to help neighborhood associations “qualify” for city planning grants and other benefits.
2. Assist residents to establish new neighborhood associations or strengthen existing ones to prepare “qualified” plans.
 - a. Identify leaders and a board of directors.
 - b. Delineate neighborhood boundaries defensible by the neighborhood association.
 - c. Prepare a land use and circulation plan for each neighborhood incorporating streets, parks, schools, shops and the pathways that connect them.
 - d. Embrace a diversity of housing types, styles and price points reflecting the composition of the city’s households.
 - e. Plan for the full range of infrastructure from public safety to community health care to stormwater management.
 - f. Establish a financial plan for funding and sustaining the neighborhood association and its neighborhood infrastructure.
3. Provide city-sponsored beautification plans with canopy and decorative trees in all parts of the neighborhood as a benefit to associations with a “qualified” plan.
4. Establish a communication system within the neighborhood association and between the host city agency that is open and interactive using tradition and digital media.

Source: wck planning, inc.

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The Five Cs of Neighborhood Planning

1. **Complete.** Great neighborhoods host a mix of uses in order to provide for our daily need to live, work, play, worship, dine, shop, and talk to each other.
2. **Compact.** The 5-minute walk from center to edge, a basic rule-of-thumb for walkability, equates to approximately 80 to 160 acres, or 9 to 18 city blocks.
3. **Connected.** Great neighborhoods are walkable, drivable, and bike-able with or without transit access.
4. **Complex.** Great neighborhoods have a variety of civic spaces, such as plazas, greens, recreational parks, and natural parks.
5. **Convivial.** The livability and social aspect of a neighborhood is driven by the many and varied communities that not only inhabit, but meet, get together, and socialize within a neighborhood.

Link: <http://www.placemakers.com/2012/08/30/the-five-cs-of-neighborhood-planning/>

My Community.org.uk

From time to time we all come across an interesting piece of work that was totally unexpected. Such is the case with MyCommunity.org.uk. A British take on community planning that adds another perspective to work in American small cities and towns. The breadth of programs offered and the basic approach to planning, especially neighborhood planning, is a useful demonstration of what’s being done elsewhere.

The two links below provide access. The YouTube is an animation of the neighborhood planning process that would be useful to citizens and residents becoming involved in planning for their neighborhood. It is instructive as well as a great “ice breaker”.

“Love where you live with MyCommunity.org.uk”

Make a plan and make a difference!
Whether you want to save your local pub or develop more affordable housing in your area, it’s easy to get started today.

Link: <https://www.youtube.com/user/MyCommunityRights?reload=9>
<https://mycommunity.org.uk/>

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IMPLEMENTING NEIGHBORHOOD PLANS.

1. Establish a city-wide program to create A *Guide for Neighborhood Planning* including:
 - A Community Education Program to develop neighborhood leadership.
 - Neighborhood plan standards and methods for a city-approvable plan.
 - Neighborhood infrastructure standards for utilities, flood protection, police and fire, street lighting, traffic calming, zoning, school access and recreation programs for each neighborhood.
 - A citywide beautification program that gives priority city-sponsored installations to “qualified” neighborhoods.
 - A city grant program with a system for the annual selection of “qualified” neighborhoods to receive city planning grants and technical support.
2. Establish criteria for “Qualifying” neighborhood associations to receive city staff and financial support, such as:
 - A board of directors with Bylaws,
 - An agreed-upon boundary,
 - A meeting place for the membership,
 - A revenue source, no matter how humble, and
 - A “Certificate of Qualification” from the city indicating the association meets city standards.
3. Annually “qualify” neighborhood associations based on funding.
 - Solicit neighborhoods to organize themselves and seek certification as a “qualified” association.
 - Solicit applications from “qualified” neighborhoods for city grant support to complete neighborhood plans.

- Enable Qualified Neighborhood Associations not selected for funding by the city in any one year to proceed at their own pace, should they choose, by using the *Guide for Neighborhood Planning*.

PRINCIPLES OF NEIGHBORHOOD DESIGN

- They are walkable from end to end,
- They have a civic core and a mix of uses and amenities,
- They have an interconnected street network,
- They have recognizable boundaries,
- They provide for chance meetings and privacy, and
- They have a variety of housing types.

Source: Urban Land Magazine, May 2004, p63.

CONCLUSIONS.

1. A city policy of “neighborhood primacy” will drive all city actions to preserve and protect people in their homes and neighborhoods.
2. The resulting City Neighborhood Planning Program will consist of numerous neighborhood action plans to be executed by various city departments to protect and enhance neighborhood streets, parks, schools and shopping districts.
3. Neighborhood leadership training is an essential on-going activity to be sponsored by the city to ensure effective preparation and implementation of neighborhood plans.
4. Some neighborhoods will want to participate and become “qualified”, some will not. Start with the willing and work on the others as time permits.
5. Strong neighborhoods help retain and recruit businesses.